

The Importance of National Wildlife Refuges

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Most people know about the pleasure of watching flocks of birds flying south or observing a prairie dog carefully excavate a hole for habitation. However, these people don't realize that wildlife such as prairie dogs, ducks, geese, sparrows, and white-tailed deer are reaching extinction. Human interaction with the wilderness and wildlife is almost always the reason for the extinction of species of animals. Without sufficient wildlife, the balance of nature which is integral to all organisms cannot be maintained on Earth. (Scott, 137). Therefore, natural wildlife refuges that are located in the Great Plains states are unequivocally important in protecting prairie potholes, water fowl production areas, and prairie grasslands, because they maintain the balance of nature on Earth (Scott, 137). Three refuges that show the importance of this protection include the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado, and the Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge in North Dakota.

The Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado is a wildlife refuge that provides enough sun and rain to support the growth of trees and to encourage live trout in streams. It was developed in the year 1967 to alleviate the raising of waterfowl, such as ducks and geese. In the prairies of the Dakotas and Minnesota, waterfowl habitats, such as wetlands, have constantly been destroyed due to human intervention. Farming, road constructions, and development of buildings have made most of the land unsuitable for waterfowls. The Arapaho Refuge was established later in the Midwest to prevent the population of waterfowls from declining. It achieves this goal in a few ways: irrigation, periodic burning, and the manipulation of water

Irrigation includes the distribution of water from the Illinois River to fill waterfowl brooding ponds (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2). This manipulation of water ensures adequate

vegetation, escape cover, and insects with protein needed for egg laying and food. Periodic burning maintains suitable vegetation for nesting as well.

The Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado is another wildlife refuge that includes mostly high plains or short grass prairies. More species, such as the bison and the black-tailed prairie dog, occur across this area because of the artificial landscape developed in the refuge. For example, water irrigation, lake and wetland production, and tree planting have sustained the prolific population of wildlife in the Rocky Mountains. More species became naturalized in this region. For example, small birds, such as the lark bunting, that can't live in agricultural regions usually find suitable habitation across vast prairies. Another bird, called the burrowing owl, uses prairie dog towns developed in the refuge as a place to raise their young. Prairie dog towns are rarely found anywhere else in Colorado.

A third wildlife refuge is named the Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge in North Dakota. Because this refuge is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, most of the species that flourish in the refuge include waterfowls and migratory birds. Tundra swans, pintails, canvasbacks, redheads, and buffleheads can be seen during spring and fall migrations (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2). The refuge manages this variety of birds by periodically burning and grazing the land. This process maintains constant vegetation, nesting, and escape cover, which can't be found in other areas in North Dakota.

Conclusively, the importance of national wildlife refuges across the Great Plains is that they help maintain the balance of nature, which is essential for life forms on Earth (Scott, 137). A reasonable outcome for the future would be to develop more refuges in critical areas across the rest of America and the world. More species would be saved from extinction every day. All

refuges, including those in Colorado and North Dakota, give all endangered species natural habitats which are different from the habitats that humans are constantly changing.



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